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10-15-1945

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### Recommended Citation

Kumlien, W. F., "An Interdenominational State-Wide Church Survey for South Dakota" (1945). *Agricultural Experiment Station Rural Sociology Pamphlets*. 113.

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AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL STATE-WIDE CHURCH SURVEY FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

W. F. Kumlien

The following plan for conducting an interdenominational state-wide church survey has been evolved jointly by the Research division of the Rural Sociology Department at South Dakota State College and the South Dakota Council of Churches and Christian Education. It is proposed that such a survey should be carried out by county units and on a family basis so that if and when the project is completed, the cooperators would have a complete record by counties of the church relationship of approximately every family in the state.

The sources of information to be used for the survey in each county would be:

1. From county court house and county seat official records.
2. All church membership rolls and Sunday School attendance records in the county.
3. From the state census cards of 1945, at Pierre.

By filling out the family church survey cards (Fig. 1) derived from the above sources, the denominations in each county would then have a current list of their resident families classified into three broad categories. Families having:

1. Church membership by denomination.
2. No church membership, but have expressed a church preference.
3. No church affiliation and do not attend anywhere.

In addition to the above, the survey seeks to find if and where the families attend Sunday School. Another important objective of the survey is to discover where town and country families attend church, thereby arriving at what might be called the various church neighborhoods and communities of South Dakota.

As a division of labor, The State Council of Churches proposes to assist the counties requesting help in organizing their local church surveys, while the Rural Sociology Department agrees to analyze the data and publish the results of county surveys after completion into separate county mimeographed circulars, and finally to publish a printed bulletin summarizing the survey results for the entire state.

Naturally, the main task of carrying on the survey will have to be the collective responsibility of the various churches in each local county. The plan of procedure, however, is quite simple and inexpensive, and can be done almost entirely by the ministers and a few lay helpers from each of the churches operating in the county.

The following pages set forth briefly the procedure in sequence necessary to complete each county church survey.

Initial Organization Meeting:

In each county, an initial organization meeting should be held of all the ministers serving in the county. The first step would be to consider:

1. The desirability of a local county survey.
2. The main purposes and objectives of the survey.
3. The church survey card, (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1  
CHURCH SURVEY CARD

Card No. _____			Town _____ St. _____			
County _____			Twp. _____ Section _____			
Name of Family _____			P. O. _____			
1. _____	2. _____	3. _____	4. _____	5. _____	6. _____	7. _____
Given Name:	Birthdate and Age:	Member of what church:	Where:	Attend what Sunday School:	Church pre- ference if not members:	Do not attend anywhere
Husband _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Wife _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Children at home _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Others living in household _____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

The County Committee:

If these above three points for consideration are agreed upon, a county committee should then be selected by those present. This committee should preferably include at least one minister from each of the main denominations operating in the county, together with either a layman or a laywoman from each of the same denominations.

The newly elected county committee should then organize itself with the necessary officers and subcommittees to carry out the survey project on a county unit basis, but working through its various minor civil divisions, consisting of the towns (cities, Towns, Villages) and the various townships.

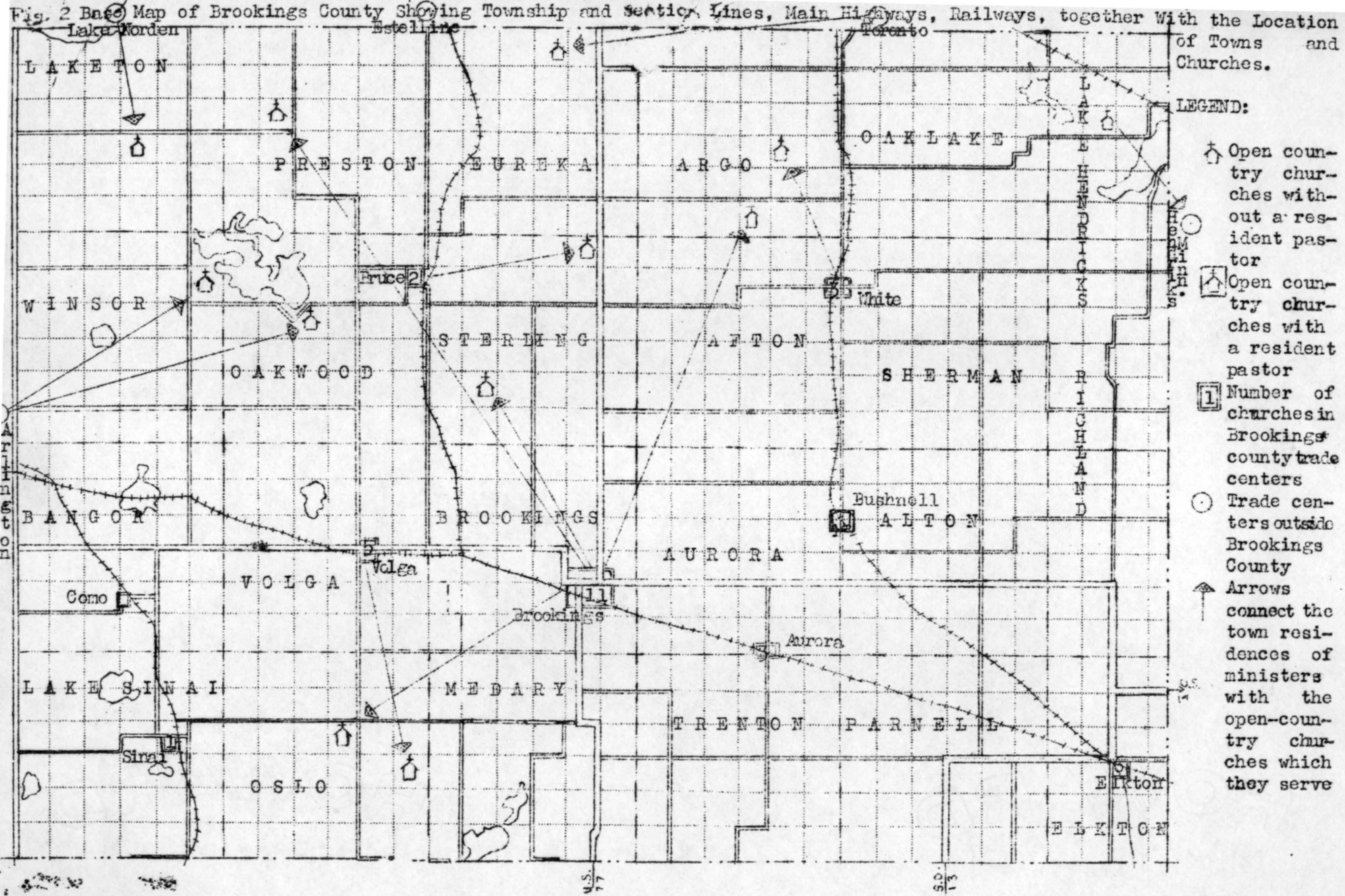
A number of tasks will immediately confront the county committee somewhat as follows:

1. The making of a base map of the county, dividing it up into its minor civil divisions including both towns and townships. The size of the map will depend somewhat on the number of townships in the county. The base map should be large enough so as to give an overall view of the total situation in the county. (Fig. 2)

2. The second task will be to take charge of getting a complete list of all the families in each of the minor civil divisions in the county. To expedite things, this committee should enlist from the county seat town churches, a number of volunteer typists who will work in the county court house for two or three days, transferring the names of the taxpayers and



Fig. 2 Base Map of Brookings County Showing Township and Section Lines, Main Highways, Railways, together With the Location of Towns and Churches.





duplicate family cards. Considerable care should be used in copying the exact location of the families, showing by the street address or section whether they live in town or country. The children's names will have to be secured from the school census in the county superintendent's office. Unfortunately, the school census will include only the names of children from six to twenty-one years of age. To find the names of children under six, a visit should be made to the County Clerk of Court's office. They will have a record only of children born within that county. For children under six born outside of the county, the state census cards at Pierre will provide their names and ages.

If any doubt exists as to whether all current resident families are included in the survey cards for each minor civil division, a brief check can be made with other county seat town sources.

For country families, the best check would probably be with the county "Triple A" office. The Triple A office maintains township maps showing the location of all farm operators together with aerial photographs of where their farmsteads are located.

For towns, the list of families can be checked with the local Chamber of Commerce, in order to catch the new comers not included in the assessor's lists. Another possibility is to check the monthly changes that have taken place among utility users living in towns.

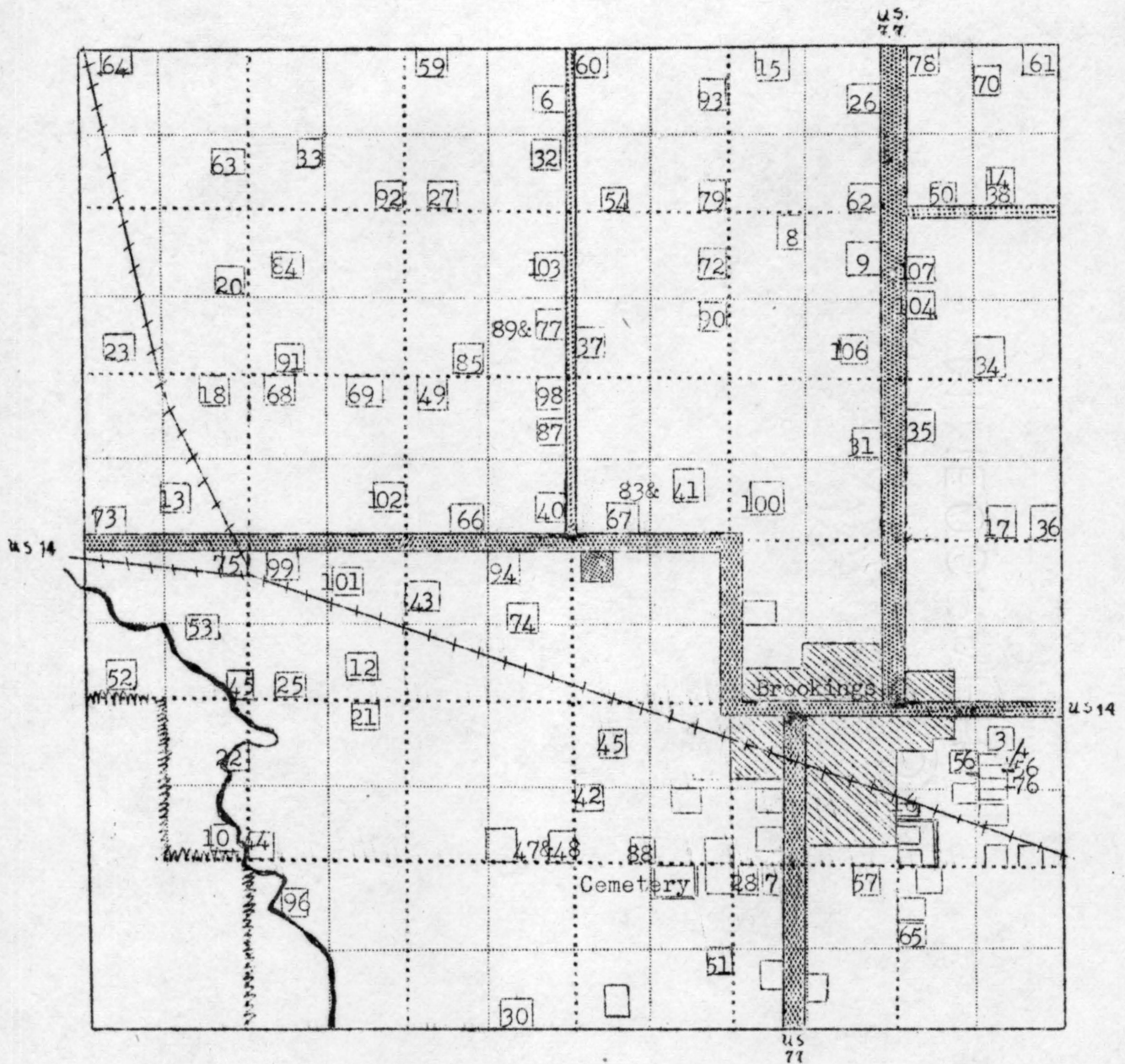
3. The completed family survey cards should now be arranged alphabetically and numbered for each town or township. In order to be of greatest use to pastors, both country and town families should be located on maps or if preferred, mimeographed lists can be made with full description of location and address. Outline township maps can be secured from the South Dakota Council of Churches headquarters, that will serve as a base map for standard six by six mile townships in South Dakota. Look at your township list of family cards and note whether the exact location of each country family is given showing the number of the section and quarter section where the family resides. Place the card number of each family in its proper location within the township section and quarter section after the names have been alphabetized. (Fig. 3)

A similar procedure can be followed in locating town families. (Fig. 4) The Registrar of Deed's office has plats of practically all small towns and villages. Outline copies can be mimeographed of the plats so that after the families have been alphabetized, the numbers can be located on the plat, as in figure 4. For the larger towns, this process may be impractical, as there are so many names involved. If the family address is stated plainly on the cards, most ministers can locate either a country or town family quickly, without the aid of a map.

#### Town and Township Committees:

At this stage, subcommittees should be appointed by the county committee for each town and village or each township in the county. Here again, these minor civil division subcommittees should consist of a ministerial representative of each denomination represented together with a layman or laywoman from the same groups. When these subcommittees hold their initial meeting, the ministers should bring along their respective membership rolls and Sunday School records. As the family cards are then reviewed alphabetically, the ministers can tell which families are church members, the denomination they belong to, where they attend church, and if an where they attend Sunday School. These town and township committees will then fill in the data for each family card in columns 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. After these entries have been made, the

Fig. 3  
Location of Farm Families Living in Brookings Township as of 1945



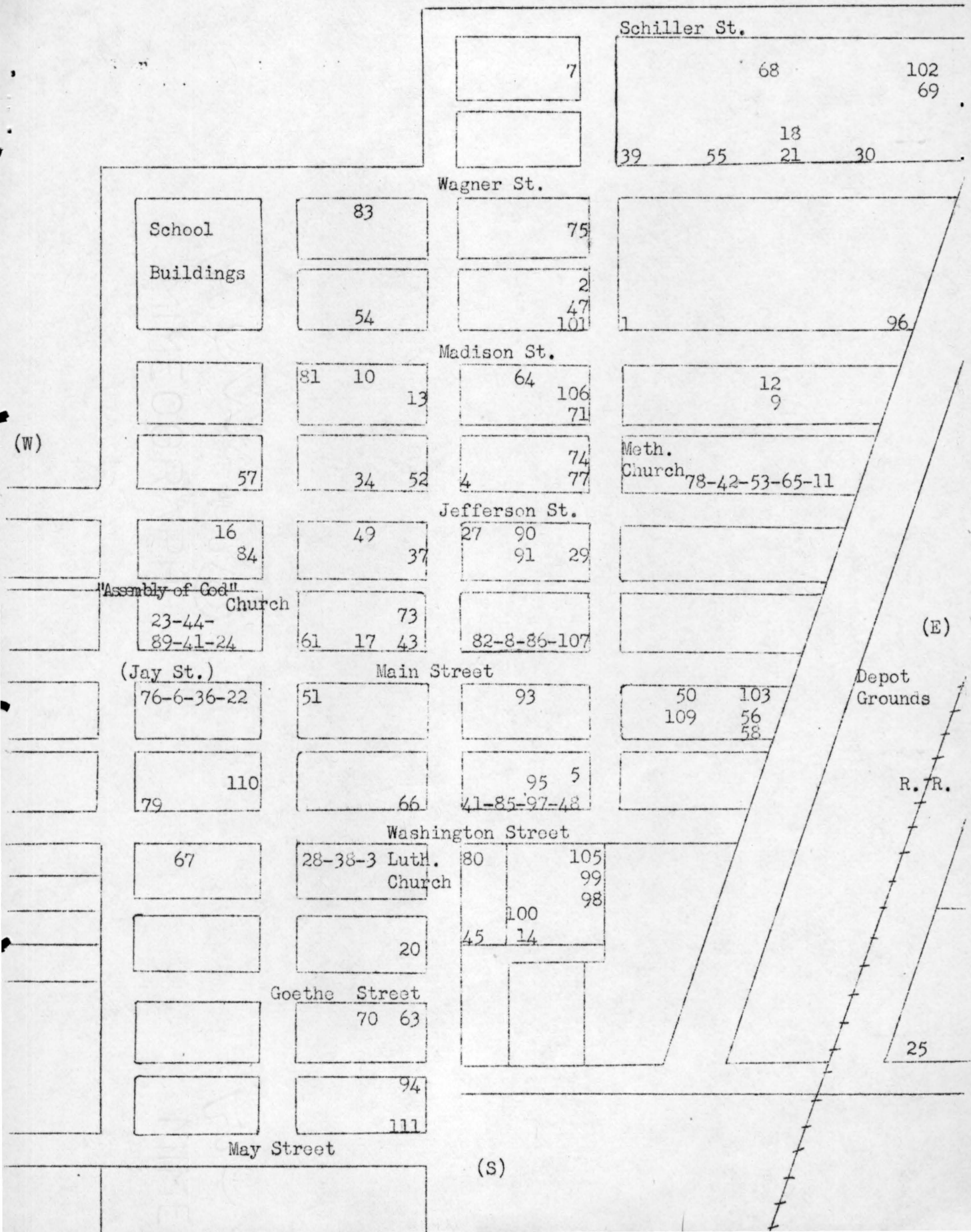
LEGEND:

- 18 Location of Farm Families (numbers correspond to township list or family survey cards)

(N)

Fig. 4

Town Plat of Bruce, South Dakota





family cards should then be tied together securely and sent back to the county committee to the remaining data from the 1945 state census at Pierre.

#### Contribution from the State Census:

After the county committee has received the partially filled in family cards from all of the minor civil divisions, they should then be sent by express to Pierre to be checked with the state census of 1945, with special reference to family "church affiliation". The analysis at Pierre should yield three new items of information to be filled in the family cards.

1. The first of these should be to confirm the total list and age of individuals, regrouped into families, for each minor civil division in the county. (Columns 1, and 2) The state census is taken on an individual basis, having one card filled out for each individual. No hint is give, however, as to which family each individual belongs to. (Incidentally, this is one of the inherent weaknesses of the state census cards for sociological research purposes.) The family church survey cards constitutes a regrouping of the individuals on to a family basis. In this regrouping process there may be found a very few individual census cards that cannot be accounted for in regard to their family relationship. As a consequence, such remaining names should be listed alphabetically on a separate sheet of paper and sent back to the county accompanying its respective list of minor civil division cards.

2. The second entry on the family cards from the state census is the church affiliation or church preference of those families who were not designated as church members by their respective local subcommittee in the county. (Column 6.)

3. The third entry will be for those families who have not answered the question pertaining to church affiliation, but have left it blank. We assume that the bulk of such cards represent those remaining families who are without a church preference or who do not attend church anywhere. (Column 7)

#### Final Stage of Survey:

The cards from each county should now be shipped back from Pierre to their respective county committee for final review and rechecking. In practically all instances the cards should be relayed by the county committee on to their respective town or township subcommittees. When the latter have finished with their work, they should then return the cards to the county headquarters for final disposition.

The county committee should then see that both sets of duplicate cards are edited and completed. The carbon copy set should be sent to the Rural Sociology Department, State College at Brookings, where the results of the survey will be analyzed and written up in mimeographed county circulars. The original cards should then be divided by denominations and sent to the local pastors in the church communities concerned. The basis for determining to whom the cards should be sent is two fold:

1. The pastor of the church where the family has church membership.
2. The pastor of the church where the family does not hold membership, but has expressed a preference for that particular denomination or church.

A third group of cards now remain. This is the list of families who have not answered the question on church affiliation, thereby implying that they have no church preferences and do not attend anywhere. The county committee should determine what they want to do with this list. One way of handling it would be to mimeograph such a list by church communities and put it in the hands of each pastor in the community to do with it as he sees fit.

#### Future Church Surveys:

It is hoped that the suggestions made in the circular might serve as a workable pattern for future periodic interdenominational surveys for each county. The American public has become so mobile, that a new survey is required either annually or biannually to keep the pastors calling list of members or prospects up to date. Once the necessary procedure has been learned by a few ministers in the county it is much easier to repeat the process, as much of the basic materials will remain the same for many years.